

Ms. LeBaron is a renowned columnist for the Press Democrat newspaper, the best known historian of Sonoma County, and has been prolifically telling the story of our county, with over eight thousand articles published. Ms. LeBaron possesses a rare gift: a genuine interest in people and their stories. In even the smallest stories, she saw the larger truth. Her influence and acclaim have grown over the years because of this focus and the level of trust she has built with the general public through her constancy.

As one of Ms. LeBaron's colleagues at the Press Democrat put it: "Readers trust her to tell them the truth about what is going on in their community. The depth of her commitment is palpable and readers respond to that."

Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate at this time that we honor and thank Ms. LeBaron not only for her commitment to telling the story of Sonoma County, but also for her commitment to our community. Ms. LeBaron's unyielding dedication to the people and places that make our region unique is greatly appreciated by our entire community and we wish her continued success.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADAM SMITH

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, March 4, 2015, I was unable to be present for recorded votes. Had I been present, I would have voted:

"no" on roll call vote No. 110 (on agreeing to the McClintock amendment to H.R. 749),

"yes" on roll call vote No. 111 (on the motion to recommit H.R. 749, with instructions), and

"yes" on roll call vote No. 112 (on passage of H.R. 749).

EXEMPLARY VOLUNTEERISM: PAM KLEINSCHMIDT AND JERRY LAWSON

HON. RICHARD M. NOLAN

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Mr. NOLAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two citizen volunteers from the Lincoln Park neighborhood in Duluth. They have used their talents to give back to the community by assisting with policing efforts.

Pam Kleinschmidt regularly staffs the Lincoln Park and West Duluth police stations by answering phones and assisting with walk-in traffic. Pam, who is often referred to as the "Mayor of Lincoln Park," goes out of her way often at her own expense to take phone calls from concerned citizens at all hours of the day and night. In addition to helping the police build relationships with residents and small business owners in the neighborhood, she organizes monthly meetings for citizens and makes sure their concerns are addressed. Pam has been instrumental each week in keeping an eye on problem areas in the neighborhood and works with the police to help find solutions.

When the police department found itself needing help with managing seized cars used to commit crimes, they were fortunate to find a multi-faceted volunteer in Jerry Lawson. They needed a mechanic, an accountant and a customer service representative. He fulfills all these tasks and the police department frankly says they couldn't manage the impound lot without him. Jerry's volunteer efforts as he helped establish the "Vial of Life" program, which provides medical information to first responders as well as helping expand and improve the citizen patrol program.

They were recently honored by receiving the Police Chief's Citizen Partnerships Awards by Duluth's Police Chief Gordon Ramsay. I stand today to salute these exceptional volunteers who are making a true difference in their community.

DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT OF 2015

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce the Democracy Restoration Act of 2015. This legislation will serve to clarify and expand voting rights, as well as assist former felons with their reintegration into our democracy.

The Sentencing Project reports that, since 1997, 23 states have amended felony disenfranchisement policies in an effort to reduce their restrictiveness and expand voter eligibility. These reforms have resulted in an estimate of 800,000 citizens regaining their voting rights. Yet, despite these reforms, an estimated 5.85 million people continue to be ineligible to vote in Federal elections, including more than 4 million who reside in the 35 states that still prohibit some combination of persons on probation, parole, and/or people who have completed their sentence from voting.

I believe that there are three grave discrepancies in State laws regarding felony convictions that lead to unfairness in Federal elections. First, there is no uniform standard for voting in Federal elections, which leads to an egregious disparity and unequal participation in Federal elections based solely on where a person lives. Second, laws governing the restoration of voting rights after a felony conviction are unequal throughout the country and persons in some States can easily regain their voting rights while in other States persons effectively lose their right to vote permanently. Third, State disenfranchisement laws disproportionately impact ethnic minorities, thus adversely infringing upon citizens of these communities constitutional right to vote.

These concerns about ex-offender disenfranchisement are not rhetorical. In the past two election cycles, flawed voter purges have deprived thousands of legitimate voters of their rights. For example, an erroneous interpretation of state law by the Ohio Secretary of State deprived thousands of ex-felons in that state of even the right to register. Only Federal law can conclusively resolve the ambiguities in this area plaguing our voting system.

Like the States, Congress has recognized the need to address the barriers to full citizen-

ship faced by ex-offenders. This voting legislation is the next step in restoring the ex-felon community to full citizenship. Denying voting rights to ex-offenders robs them of the opportunity to fully participate and contribute to their society. Disenfranchisement laws isolate and alienate ex-offenders, and have been shown to serve as one more obstacle in their attempt to successfully reintegrate into society. Moreover, these obstacles adversely impact the voting participation of their families, further undermining the effectiveness of our voting system.

This legislation is a narrowly crafted effort to expand voting rights for ex-felons, while protecting State prerogatives to generally establish voting qualifications. This legislation would only apply to persons who have been released from prison, and it would only apply to federal elections. Consequently, the bill is fully consistent with Constitutional requirements established by the Supreme Court in a series of decisions upholding Federal voting rights laws.

In past Congresses, voting restoration legislation has been supported by a broad coalition of groups interested in voting and civil rights, including the NAACP, ACLU, the National Council of Churches (National and Washington Office), the National Urban League, the Human Rights Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, among many others.

The practice of many states denying voting rights to former felons represents a vestige from a time when suffrage was denied to whole classes of our population based on race, gender, religion, national origin, and property. Ex-felons who have been lawfully released from prisons have paid their debts to society. To continue denying them the ability to reclaim rights as citizens resurrects historic unenlightened practices of our society. Ultimately, I believe that we fail not only ex-offenders by denying them the right to vote, but the rest of a society that has struggled throughout its history to be legitimate and inclusive. Just like poll taxes and literacy tests, it is long past time that these restrictions be relegated to unenlightened history.

EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE

HON. PETE OLSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 19, 2015

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Rotary Club of Katy for receiving the Katy Area Chamber of Commerce Award for Exceptional Service. Formed in 1946, the Rotary Club has served Katy for nearly sixty years.

The Katy Area Chamber of Commerce selected the Rotary Club of Katy because of their dedication to our community. Every year they hold two large fundraisers. To date, they have raised and donated over \$110,000 to local schools and charities in Katy. I thank the Rotary Club of Katy for their selfless dedication and focus on giving back to our community. With an emphasis on community service, Rotary Clubs across America play a vital role in strengthening our local communities.

On behalf of the residents of the Twenty-Second Congressional District of Texas, congratulations again to the Rotary Club of Katy for being presented the Katy Area Chamber of